

West Chester, PA – This morning, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA07) greeted the members of Keshet Israel and took the opportunity to recognize synagogue members for their service to people of the West Chester area as well as to discuss some of the important roles that houses of worship have in a community. He made particular note of the current holiday of Sukkot, one of the most joyous periods on the Jewish calendar, referring to the Torah reading from the first day of the festival, which includes the commandment that during the gathering of the harvest, farmers must leave individual stalks that fall to the ground so the poor can collect them. Keshet Israel has certainly carried out the tradition of charitable acts. —

“This institution prides itself on its commitment to repairing the world, Tikkun Olam, and lovingkindness, Chesed,” said Congressman Sestak. “Through their Operation Isaiah and Safe Harbor programs, which consist of collecting food for those in need and assisting the homeless, Keshet Israel has created a model for how we can organize to help those who are less fortunate.”

Government and religious communities have long sought solutions to alleviate social ills, including violence, and the Congressman frequently notes the similar approaches each group takes to address such issues. Both rely on principles of faith, hope, and charity to accomplish their goals.

Members of religious institutions like Keshet Israel rely on their faith in God. Lawmakers, too, rely on faith; a faith in the belief of our democracy and the ideals and values of our country. In addition, hope for peace and goodwill is a guiding tenet in both the government and religious communities. Most importantly religious congregants from all backgrounds are deeply rooted in values of charity. Though not charity, the Congressman sees these same values of helping those most in need in the programs of the federal government.

The Congressman further used a commentary (a midrash) on the Torah to describe the wonderful characteristics – including loyalty to both people and community – that exemplifies the values of the Keshet Israel congregation. In the story, a businessman from the land of Israel traveling in a foreign country is found guilty of spying and sentenced to execution. He is allowed to return to Israel for 30 days by having a friend take his place in prison with the stipulation that the friend will be hanged if the man does not come back within the 30 day period. When a storm delays the man’s return, it appears the friend will be hung; however, the man arrives moments before the hanging. He insists that he is to be punished, not his friend, while the friend argues that it is too late, and to still hang him. The king, hearing the argument, asked to see them and, after listening to them both, allows them to go free under the condition that he can be the “third friend.”

“It is the responsibility of those in government service to ensure the health and welfare of our residents,” Congressman Sestak said. “However, it is also the caring, committed and compassionate men and women in our local communities, who, with the guidance of individuals like Rabbi Eric Rosen, often truly make a difference in many people’s lives.”

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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